

The Social Dimension of Dialectology

JOSÉ PEDRO RONA

This paper is not a discussion of Sociolinguistics, but rather what we might call Socio-dialectology. As I have pointed out elsewhere (Rona 1970), I claim that Sociolinguistics should not be understood as an interdisciplinary overlapping of Sociology and linguistics, but rather as a part of linguistics, since its subject is not society but rather the social aspects of language. For the same reason, I do not believe that Socio-dialectology should be considered as being an interdisciplinary overlapping of Sociolinguistics and dialectology; it is simply a part of dialectology, or a new form of dialectology. It could even be argued that it is not new at all, since sociolinguistic diversity of dialects has always been of concern to dialectologists. The term *social dialect*, to my knowledge, was first used by Vicente García de Diego in 1926. The first practical distinction between sociolinguistic levels in field work was made by Karl Jaberg in Florence for the Linguistic Atlas of Italy and Switzerland (AIS). As far as I know, the first methodological discussion of the social aspects of dialects was undertaken in 1934 by Adolf Bach, and the first consideration of sociolinguistic differences in dialectal diversification appears to be in a booklet of my own, published in 1958.

However, in the past, dialectologists excluded from their research the study of the socially higher forms of dialects, while nowadays their comparison with the socially lower forms is becoming almost mandatory.

In any case, no scientific activity can be fruitful if the subject and scope of the science is not sufficiently clarified from the very beginning. Consequently, we will try here to give some consideration to the problem of the social – but not necessarily sociological – aspects of dialectology. To do this, we must view the general scope of dialectology and of sociolinguistic perspective.

According to Coseriu (1955) dialectology proper is not the description of dialects, but rather the description of dialectal variance. While we believe this to be the case, the definition has, by no means, attained